

CONSIDERING Discipleship

MATTHEW 8.18-22; LUKE 9.57-62

There are times while reading or studying in the Gospels that we find two recordings of events that sound very similar – as if they were the same event told from different perspectives. The challenge is often made, however that these cannot be the same stories because the settings are so different.

It would appear that, even though the stories are very similar, they must be two different events that have similar content.

Such is the event recorded in **Matt. 8.18-22**.

In chapters 5-7 of Matthew, Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount. Most commentators believe this took place on a hillside north of the Sea of Galilee near the city of Capernaum, the hometown of Peter and Andrew, and of James and John. These are the disciples present when Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5.1).

Following the SOTM, Jesus healed a man of leprosy (8.1-4), healed the servant of a Roman centurion (8.5-13), and he healed the mother of Peter (8.14-15), as well as many other who were sick or possessed by demons.

There is no time table given during these events, but the healings most likely took place not long after the sermon that had so astonished those who heard it.

It was obvious that Jesus taught with authority that seemed greater than the religious leaders of the day (7.29). Now, He healed with that same authority and power (8.9). Men were impressed, and, as usually happens when someone performs a noteworthy event, Jesus soon had a following of disciples as well as want-to-be's.

According to Matthew, the crowds that followed closely on Jesus' heels grew to the point that Jesus commanded to be carried to the other side – the assumption being that it was one of the four disciples He had called earlier who were fishermen by trade and

therefore had access to boats to carry Him across the Sea of Galilee.

Luke relates a similar story in **Luke 9.57-62**.

In Luke's version, Jesus and the disciples are traveling through Samaria. Having been refused accommodations in one Samaritan city, the disciples and Jesus were heading towards another village when Jesus addressed the questions of those who desired to become His disciples.

I do not know why the settings are different. It could be that the two events are totally different and the questions just happened to be the same. It could be that the incidents were the same and Matthew and Luke used them at these particular points in their narratives to make a point. I will leave such discernments to the scholars with this one observation:

I long ago determined to accept the teaching that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3.16), and is, therefore, both infallible and inerrant. So whether there were two men or three, the message is still the same.

So what I want us to concentrate on this morning is the substance of the conversation between those who sought the position of discipleship and Jesus' response to them.

Read verses 19-20.

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown in their commentary on Matthew referred to this first inquirer as "The Rash or Precipitate Disciple."

This man said to Jesus in what appears to be an over-enthusiastic zeal, "I will follow you anywhere. Wherever you go, there I will go."

There are several ways of seeing this man, whom Matthew identified as a scribe.

Typically, a scribe was used to a life of ease. He would have lived in a comfortable home with plenty of food and income and never if ever had to lift his hand in hard labor or face any of life's unusual adversities.

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Some have said that he was avaricious, seeing in this promised Messiah a way to luxury and wealth that would suit his lifestyle. He appeared to be seeking gain from God's glory.

Yet the Bible does not speak about the man's motives. We only hear in his voice an enthusiasm that, based on the context of Matthew, seems to indicate that his excitement is based on the message and the miracles he has witnessed.

Many of those who identify themselves as Christians are like this. They trace their testimony back to some single moment in time when, in the midst of an exciting or emotional moment they invited Jesus to come and live in their hearts. Then, when most of the glamour of that moment had faded away, they settled into the comfortable lifestyle of the typical church member.

I want to say to you today that Jesus did not come into the world and face the rejection of His own family and His nation and go to through the suffering of the Passion Week and the agony of a cross to make anyone comfortable.

He came into the world, died on a cross, and rose again from the grave to overcome sin and death, to defeat Satan, and to give life to people dead in sin – not just any life but the kind of life that God has – eternal life.

He did not come to give us life for our sakes, but for the glory of and according to the will of the Father.

Furthermore, He did not just give us life – but life more abundantly – the kind of life that is able to love like the Father and to serve with the passion of the Father and with His glory in mind. We are saved unto good works, not a good world.

If all we have to say about Christ is what He has done for us and not what He has done through us then we have not understood salvation or discipleship.

When this man offered to go anywhere with Jesus, Jesus knew where He was going, and He knew that this man did not have a clue to what lay ahead.

So Jesus did not reply directly to the man's statement.

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The man said, "I will follow you anywhere."

Jesus replied, "I have no home."

The man was talking about routes.

Jesus responded with roots.

Ravi Zacharias

...in the East, the home is the defining cultural indicator. Everything that determines who you are and what your future bodes is tied into your heritage and your social standing. Absolutely everything."

It may very well be that this scribe was looking for an easy road to riches. Whether that was the case or not, Jesus, who knows the hearts of all men, knew what his motives were.

He warned the man in so many words that all that lay ahead for Jesus and his disciples was reproach, poverty, persecution, and a cross.

Here is the first lesson for those who would be Jesus' disciple:

Matt. 16:24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Some have interpreted Jesus' reply to the man to imply that the man turned away from being a disciple or that this was Jesus' way of rejecting him. The Bible is silent on that issue. We do not know whether the man followed or not. That is not the lesson.

The lesson is that following Christ requires that we recognize first that there is a cost and that the cost might be higher than we are willing to pay.

I hesitate to use the phrase "count the cost" because our minds immediately go to dollars and cents. The cost of discipleship has little to do with money and possessions. It has everything to do with persecution and hardships.

Yet our financial security is one of the things that prevents us from making a total sell-out to discipleship.

Read verses 22-23.

JFB calls this man “The Procrastinating or Entangled Disciple.” The Expositor’s Bible calls him “The Hesitating Disciple.”

Matthew refers to the first person as a scribe. He calls the second person a disciple.

Many commentators have made much of this distinction, saying that the first man was not called and that the second man was.

Some have even gone so far as to identify this person as one of the twelve disciples, some even saying that it was Philip or possibly James or John.

There is little to be added to the story by making such distinctions. All of the men in this story were men who, for one reason or another, talked to Jesus about becoming His disciple.

The man seemed as eager to follow Christ as the first, yet he felt a greater need hindered him. He wanted to go home and bury his father.

Again, there is great speculation about whether the man’s father was already dead, was in the last stages of life and could be expected to die at any moment, or whether the disciple simply wanted to take care of family obligations before committing to follow Christ.

Christ’s answer seems to be rather harsh and without mercy. “Let the dead bury the dead.”

Jesus’ answer seems to be more of an encouragement than a rebuke. Jesus knew that this man could be an asset to the ministry if he got his priorities in order and freed himself from the entanglements of life. So He told him (NLT)...

Luke 9:60 But Jesus told him, “Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead! Your duty is to go and preach about the Kingdom of God.”

I believe Jesus is telling the disciples that following Him is not only about cost but about choice. We must decide who will be the priority in our lives. For most of us, we would probably say

that our priority is God first, then family. But our lives tell another story, because nothing can keep us from participating in the work of the church faster than a family-related event.

Matt. 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

You aren’t the first couple to have children and you are not the first children to have parents reach old age. Jesus said this in full knowledge of everything about your life.

To use your family as an excuse for not being a disciple of Christ is, to me, a dangerous thing. God has a way of removing obstacles that stand in the way of getting His work done.

This vignette or story ends in Matthew with just two inquirers, but Luke includes a third. Let’s go there for a moment and see this man’s reasoning concerning discipleship.

Read Luke 9.61-62

JFB calls this man “The Irresolute or Wavering Disciple.”

Just as the first man said and second man implied, this disciple said, “Lord, I will follow you. But I would like to have time to go home and spend a little bit of time with the family before I give my life to being a disciple.”

It is interesting that each of the men who talked to Jesus in this discourse referred to Him as Lord – *kurois: he to whom a person or thing belongs, about which he has power of deciding.*

This is evidence to me that each of these men were serious about their desire to become disciples. Yet each had some barrier that seemed to come between their desires and their surrender to service.

For this man, it seems that he remembered the life he had at home. He remembered the house he lived in and the bed that was his. There was a roof over his head every night and food on the table.

Hadn’t Jesus just said to the first man that there would be none of those accommodations in discipleship?

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He also remembered his family – his father and mother back there on the home place.

Didn't Jesus just say that a disciple was to leave all of that behind – that even burying his parents was less important than the work of the kingdom?

Since Jesus understood this man's heart as well as He did the other two, He answered him with the reference to plowing.

A plow typically had only one handle. One hand would hold that handle to steady the plow and to keep it in the straight and narrow, while the other hand held the goad to keep the oxen moving.

To plow, the farmer had to keep his eyes on the target at the other end of the row in order to keep the furrow straight. To look back over one's shoulder while plowing ensured that the rows would not be straight.

Maybe Jesus realized that, if this man ever goes home and gets with friends and family among the favors and comforts of home, he will never make it back to the path of discipleship. The best move for him is to continue on the path he is on right now.

Neither Matthew nor Luke tells us the outcome of these men who had this discussion with Jesus. Maybe they are models of those who failed to live up to the calling of discipleship. Or maybe they listened to the teachings of their lord and master and followed as He commanded.

If we go back to Matthew a moment...

Right after this discourse, Jesus got into a boat to be carried to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. So Matthew records...

Matt .8:23 And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.

That's what disciples do – they follow their Master and become like their teacher, no matter the cost in terms of finances, family, or personal favor.

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